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ABSTRACT

Racial preference and racial attitudes were assessed in a group of black preschoolers between 4 and 5.5 years of age using the Clark Doll Test and Preschool Racial Attitudes Measure (PRAM) II. Parents were classified as activists or nonactivists based on their history of civil rights activism as revealed by a questionnaire. Racial attitudes of the children of activists and nonactivists, as assessed by PRAM II, were not significantly different. Results of the Clark Doll Test showed that the children of activists were significantly more likely to prefer the white doll, although a marginally significant interaction with sex suggested this was primarily true of females. Suggestions that activism has led to historical increases in black preference by black children are questioned by these data. (Author)

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Racial Attitudes of Black Preschoolers as Related to Parental Civil Rights Activism

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Abstract

Racial preference and racial attitudes were assessed in a group of black preschoolers between 4 and 5.5 years of age using the Clark Doll Test and Preschool Racial Attitudes Measure (PRAM) II. Parents were classified as activists or nonactivists based on their history of civil rights activism as revealed by a questionnaire. Racial attitudes of the children of activists and nonactivists, as assessed by PRAM II, were not significantly different. Results of the Clark Doll Test showed that the children of activists were significantly more likely to prefer the white doll, although a marginally significant interaction with sex suggested this was primarily true of females. Suggestions that activism has led to historical increases in black preference by black children are questioned by these data.

Racial Attitudes of Black Preschoolers as Related to Parental Civil Rights Activism

Research on black children's racial attitudes, preference and pride has been conducted for at least four decades, beginning with the work of Clark and Clark (1939) and Horowitz (1939). These early studies, using pictures of white and black children and questions regarding similarity of appearance or identification as measures of racial attitudes, both found that preschool children were clearly aware of racial differences. Clark and Clark (1947) presented black and white dolls to 150 black children and asked them to choose the doll that "is a nice doll," "is ugly," etc. A high level of rejection of the black doll was found, which the Clarks interpreted as a statement of self-hatred.

Subsequent studies continued and elaborated these findings, using the same basic methodology (e.g., Morland, 1958, 1962, 1966; Stevenson and Stewart, 1958; Trager and Yarrow 1952). Such studies converged on the conclusion that black children exhibit racial self-hatred and lack of self-esteem in their preferences for the opposite-race stimulus. However, these conclusions have recently been subjected to a variety of criticisms and reinterpretations.

First, the theory that rejection of the black doll by black children is a sign of self-hatred has been questioned by Cross (Note 1), McAdoo (1977), and Rosenberg and Simmons (1971). Cross suggested that both self-esteem and racial esteem develop in a positive direction but at varying rates and with occasional relapses particularly in the area of racial

esteem. He argued that for the first few years after becoming aware of racial differences, the level of black children's racial esteem declines, and that at about the age of seven or eight, it reverses directions and starts developing in a positive direction. McAdoo (1977) reported that negative racial attitudes have been found in preschoolers who have positive self-concepts and McAdoo (1970) found that there is no linear relationship between self-concept and racial attitudes. Rosenberg and Simmons (1971) found a high level of self-esteem among black children in grades 4-12 despite the fact that the same students showed a clear "light skin" preference. It thus seems clear that racial attitudes or esteem are not related to global self-concept. Nevertheless, racial attitudes and preference would seem to be of independent importance, although their meaning is different from that of the original Clark formulation.

A second criticism of the traditional viewpoint has been that studies have failed to demonstrate that blacks actually have a white racial preference. Banks (1976) conducted a reanalysis of preference studies and found that black subjects show a preference for whites in only 6% of the studies, a black preference in 25% of the studies, and no preference in 69%. The meaning of "no preference" is not clear, but Banks argued that it should not be evaluated against the white norm of same-race preference. This argument has recently been questioned by Williams and Morland (1979) who believe that, since a social norm exists which calls for racial identification and racial pride, the fact that black children exhibit "no preference" while white children show high rates of same-race choice is meaningful in itself. Cross (Note 1) argued that the racial preference studies suggest

that the black perspective incorporates both black and white anchor points while the white perspective is governed almost entirely by the white anchor point.

A third criticism has been methodological. Hraba (1972) has re-examined the use of the doll choice technique as a measure of racial preference and has pointed out that children change their views across the requests made of them by the researcher. Lerner has written extensively about the shortcomings of the forced-choice type of response (Lerner & Buehrig, 1975; Lerner & Knapp, 1976) and has proposed a multitrait-multimethod system of assessment (Lerner, Note 2). He has argued that by working with forced-choice data, researchers have assumed that the cognitive-affective structures underlying responses exist also as essentially dichotomized. Since the almost invariably used forced-choice technique does not permit response latitude, it eliminates the possibility of seeing which items elicit more differentiated responses.

Several recent authors have suggested that preference for blacks by black children has increased in the decades since the initial Clark studies (e.g. Brand, Ruiz & Padilla, 1974; Hraba & Grant, 1970). One suggestion of such historical change is found in the work of McAdoo (1976), who conducted a longitudinal study of the relationship of the development of racial attitudes and self-esteem in black children. Self-concept and racial attitudes were measured when the children were 4-5 years old and again when they were 9-10 years old. At the first testing, children, both northern and southern, and from both one- and two-parent families, tended to have an out-group orientation. More out-group orientation was observed

among children from middle-class homes although self-esteem was as high or higher than among children from less-advantaged environments. On follow-up, racial attitudes among northern children moved from a modified white orientation to a more black orientation. There was a moderate change in the southern sample from an out-group orientation to a score that fell in the chance or no preference group. The initial data in McAdoo's work were collected in 1969, during the early stages of the Black Movement, and the follow-up interview conducted in 1974, after the movement had gained momentum. The shifts in racial attitudes she observed could be due, then, either to the greater age and maturity of the children at follow-up, or to a change in attitudes caused by the Black Movement. Similar problems beset the study by Hraba and Grant (1970); it is not clear whether the greater black preference shown by their children as compared to those of Clark and Clark was due to historical change during the 30 year gap between studies or to uncontrolled regional differences or differences in amount of interracial contact.

It is difficult to study historical change in a manner unconfounded with age without using complicated cohort-sequential designs. However, if one has hypotheses concerning the active agent in historical change, one strategy which can be used in a cross-sectional design is to compare children of the same age who vary in exposure to this active agent. In the present case, if activism in the Black Movement is the relevant variable, it would be reasonable to expect the children of activists to show higher levels of black preference than the children of nonactivists.

The existing literature on activists and nonactivists suggests that there are continuing differences in the values and lifestyles of the two

groups. Fendrich (1974) conducted an extensive follow-up study of 150 white student activists who had been at Florida State University during the early 1960's and found that activists tended to remain politically active as they grew older. Fendrich (1976) completed a survey of 110 black activists ten years after leaving undergraduate school, and again found that activists tend to remain active throughout their adulthood. He found that blacks with more radical attitudes were more likely to have received graduate education, to have worked in the knowledge and human services industries, to have lower socioeconomic status, and to place low values on extrinsic rewards.

We have good reason, then, to expect that parental activism would affect child-rearing as it does other behaviors, and it seems natural to expect that the effect would be to increase black preference by black children. The one existing study of the relationship between racial attitudes and preference found, however, a directly opposite relationship: preschool children of parents strongly identified with the black movement showed stronger white preference than children of less active parents (Floyd, Note 3). Floyd speculated that the finding was due to the parents' heightening the children's awareness of social and racial conflict. If this relationship were replicated, it would cast doubt on some of the hypotheses concerning historical change outlined above and indicate the need for more precise study of how childrearing variables affect racial preference and attitudes.

Forced-choice tests of racial attitudes were used, despite the criticisms of them discussed above, in order to facilitate comparison

with previous studies by Clark and Clark and Hraba and Grant and thus allow conclusions about possible historical change.

Method

Subjects

The subjects for this study were boys and girls enrolled in early childhood facilities in the central ward of the city of Newark, New Jersey, in 1978. The central ward is virtually an all-black section of the city so that the opportunities for the children to interact with children of other races while at play are almost nonexistent. All of the centers involved in the study were all black. Ages for the final sample of children ranged from 3 years 9 months through 5 years 6 months. The mean age was 4 years 7 months. There were 35 girls and 26 boys.

The original pool of subjects consisted of 110 parent-child pairs who consented to participate in this study. Fifteen pairs were eliminated for a variety of reasons including not returning or not properly completing the parent's questionnaire, not residing in the target neighborhood, or the child being outside the range under consideration. Of the remaining 95 pairs, 29 were dropped because of a mixture of parental activism. That is, one parent was (is) an activist and the other was (is) not. It seemed likely that conflicting socialization messages would be presented in such families and that data from this group would not contribute to evaluating whether or not parental activism affected child attitudes.

Activism was defined as being or having been involved in civil rights activities. The parents were given a questionnaire asking if they were (had been) active in civil rights organizations (NAACP, Congress of African People - Immamu Baraka, PUSH, National Urban League, SCLC, CORE,

SNCC, Black Panthers and others) and in civil rights activities (voter registration, street demonstration petition signing, etc.). Families in which parents had been affiliated with the more radical organizations (i.e., Black Panthers, Congress of African People) or in which parents had never actually participated in any activities (i.e., those who were mere sustaining members) were eliminated from the final analysis. Five families had to be eliminated for the first reason, none for the second. (It would have been desirable to include more radical families as a separate group but there were not enough of these in the sample for this to be possible). Therefore, the study included a homogeneous group of activists, all of whom had actively engaged in mainstream civil rights activists. The nonactivist group consisted of families in which parents had never participated in any form of civil rights activities, and had never belonged to any organization.

A review of demographic data on the activists and the nonactivists showed the two groups to be quite similar except in their choice of occupations. (This difference would be expected on the basis of the work of Fendrich, 1974, 1976). The activist group consisted of 27 families (20 mother-only, 7 two-parent) and the nonactivist group consisted of 34 families (27 mother-only, 7 two-parent). Occupationally, activists were more likely to be employed in the helping professions (i.e., social services, teacher's aides, counselors, etc.) than were the nonactivists. Family SES levels were, however, comparable. These were classified and ranked as level 1 (lowest) to level 3 using codes from the Dictionary of Occupational Titles (1965). The activist group consisted of seven level

1 families, thirteen level 2 families and seven level 3 families while the nonactivist group was composed of fourteen level 1 families, twelve level 2 families and eight level 3 families ($\chi^2(2)=1.66$, n.s.).

Measurement

Clark Doll Test. The doll test, modeled after that of Clark and Clark (1947), required that each child be presented with a black and a white doll of the same gender as the child. The dolls were the same with the exception of skin color and distinctive physical features relevant to race. Four requests were made:

1. Give me the doll you want to play with.
2. Give me the doll that is a nice doll.
3. Give me the doll that looks ugly.
4. Give me the doll that is a nice color.

Each response was given a score of 1 or 2. The scoring was designed such that a high score would reflect a preference for the white doll. That is, on items 1, 2 and 4 a choice of the white doll would be scored 2 points but on item number 3 a choice of the black doll would be given 2 points since it would be reflecting a preference for the white doll. Children who refused to answer one or more of the four questions were eliminated from analyses of the Clark measure. There were five such children, one male from an activist family and one male and three females from nonactivist families.

Preschool Racial Attitudes Measure II (PRAM II). PRAM II is an individually administered picture-story procedure for the assessment of racial attitudes in young children developed by Williams, Best, Boswell, Mattson and Graves (1975). The test also yields a measure of children's

awareness of sex-typed behaviors. PRAM II has been successfully used with children as young as three years of age and as old as nine. Administration time is approximately 20 minutes.

The PRAM II test materials consist of 36 colored pictures and 36 associated stories. Twenty-four of the pictures and stories are used in the assessment of racial attitudes and the remaining 12 are used to obtain the control sex-role score. The 24 racial attitude pictures each depict drawings of two dark-haired human figures who are identical in all aspects, except that one has pinkish-tan skin (Euro-American) while the other has a medium-brown skin color (Afro-American). PRAM II utilizes a forced-choice technique. Examples of stories from PRAM II are as follows:

(1) (Afro teenage girl and Euro teenage girl, sitting.) Here are two girls. One of them is a stupid girl. She doesn't even know how to spell her name. Which is the stupid girl?

(2) (Euro man and Afro man, walking.) Here are two men. One of them is a good man. He does things for his neighbors and his children.

The PRAM II score is determined by counting one point for the selection of the light-skinned figure in response to a positive adjective, and one point for the selection of a dark-skinned figure in response to a negative adjective. Therefore the other responses are given zeroes. Racial attitude score based on all 24 items has a range of 0 - 24. High scores (> 14) are indicative of a Euro-American orientation and low scores (< 10) suggest an Afro-American orientation. Scores in the intermediate range (10 to 13) indicate a balanced preference (Williams, et al., 1975).

Procedure

Before conducting the interviews with the children, the experimenter (a black male) attended each educational facility for a day and assisted in the classroom as an aide so the children would be familiar with him. At the beginning of each session, the experimenter invited the child to go into a secluded area to look at some pictures and play a game. The use of a single black male examiner was considered justifiable because Williams, et al. (1975) report that the race and sex of the examiner does not affect the response patterns of children on PRAM II, and two studies (Hraba and Grant, 1970; Morland, 1966) report that race of examiner does not affect responses to the Clark procedure.

Each child was asked some questions about himself and his family in order to facilitate rapport. The Clark doll technique, a distractor game (a measure not relevant to the present report) and the PRAM II were administered in that order.

Results

Children's Racial Attitudes

Scores on PRAM II and the Clark Doll Test have been found to be correlated in the range of .40 to .60 by McAdoo (1970), but in the present data the correlation was only .23 ($p < .05$). This correlation did not seem to be attenuated by lack of variability; mean scores and standard deviations were 13.5 and 3.9 (range 3-21) for PRAM II and 6.2 and 1.7 (range 4-8) for the Clark Doll Test. Since the correlation was low, although significant, the data were subjected to separate 2 (activism) by 2 (sex) analyses of variance rather than to multivariate analysis of

variance. For both sets of data, a Bartlett test for homogeneity of variance was nonsignificant, indicating that analysis of variance was appropriate.

The means and standard deviations for each of the four groups for both dependent variables are shown in Table 1.

No significant effects or interactions were found for PRAM II scores. Children of activists earned a mean score of 13.3 and children of nonactivists a mean of 13.6 (i.e. both on the borderline between balanced preference and a Euro-American orientation). On the Clark Doll Test, there was a significant effect of parental activism (F (1,52)=6.3, $p < .05$). Children of activists earned a mean score of 6.8 while the children of nonactivists earned a mean score of 5.7. No significant differences were found between the racial attitudes of boys and girls. There was, however, a marginally significant interaction of sex with parental activism (F (1,52)=2.9, $p <$ .10). Difference in the Clark Doll Test as a function of activism appeared more pronounced for girls (6.8 for activists, 5.1 for nonactivists) than for boys (6.8 for activists, 6.2 for nonactivists).

Insert Table 1 about here

Discussion

Results from the two tests were inconsistent with respect to the effect of parental activism. On the PRAM II there was virtually no difference in the score of activists' and nonactivists' children. Both groups of children were within the balanced preference category. However, on the Clark Doll

Test there was a significant difference between the score of activists' and nonactivists' children. Children of activists had higher scores, showing more white preference than children of nonactivists. It appears that while both tests are appropriate for preschoolers, they tap different aspects of attitudes toward race, each perhaps important but with varying relationships to supposed antecedent conditions such as parental activism. The inconsistency between the results of the tests and their low correlation are indicators of the complexity and multidimensionality of "racial attitudes," as discussed by Hines (Note 4) and McAdoo (1976). The inconsistency is further documentation of the need for a multitrait-multimethod approach to assessing racial attitudes (Lerner, Note 2).

The data support Floyd's finding of an inverse relationship between parents' activism and the black preference of preschool children. They contradict the more common-sensical hypothesis that children of activists would be raised to feel more positive about their racial identity. On the other hand, one could just as easily argue, as did Floyd, that if parents constantly call human rights and race to the attention of children, this could cause a heightened sensitivity to racial issues and some early recognition of society's preference for whites, and that this would result in white preference on the doll test.

Two other explanations of the findings are possible. High scores on the Clark doll test in the preschool range could be interpreted as an indicator of a more advanced level of racial attitudes, that is, of a stage of awareness of the social differences implied by race in our society, which will later be replaced by black identification and pride as suggested by Cross (Note 1) and by the data of McAdoo (1976). One

could thus argue that preschool children of activists are more sophisticated socially than children of nonactivists and are progressing faster through stages of thinking about race.

A third possibility, not necessarily contradictory to the first two, might be that activist parents are more upwardly mobile and identify with the values of the white middle class and that children identify with their parents. McAdoo (1976), for instance, observed more outgroup orientation in black children from middle-class homes. In this case, such identification might lead to daughters reflecting their mothers' orientations more closely than boys, which, given the predominance of families in our sample might explain the trend to a sex by activism interaction.

More evidence is, however, clearly needed to reach a conclusion on these issues, including more information from a variety of instruments and later periods in the subjects' developmental history. We also need to obtain direct information on parents' racial attitudes and their child-rearing practices with respect to racial issues as well as other attributes of their personalities. Harris, Gough, and Martin (1950), for instance, provide evidence that racial identification and preference of young children is determined in part by the personality type, authoritarian versus non-authoritarian, of the parents, with the children of nonauthoritarian parents expressing less ambivalence about racial attitudes. What is clear on the basis of the present study and the results of Floyd is that the relationship between parental activism and racial preference of children is not a simple one. Theories of historical change in racial preference need to take this fact into account.

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Footnote

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Table 1

Means and standard deviations of Clark Doll Test and Pram II as related to parental activism and to sex

	Clark Doll Test		PRAM II	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Activists				
Male	6.8(8)[1]	1.8	13.0(9)	4.2
Female	6.8(18)	1.5	13.4(18)	4.1
Nonactivists				
Male	6.2(16)	1.8	13.8(17)	4.7
Female	5.1(14)	1.4	13.4(17)	3.0

[1]The n's for each cell are in parentheses.